

Memory Aid Toolkit

This is an optional resource for students who use memory aids as an academic accommodation. It is designed to complement the Memory Aid Guidelines provided to you by SAS.

<https://wellness.uoguelph.ca/accessibility/what-we-do/accommodations/memory-aids>

Using This Resource

This toolkit will guide you through the process of creating a memory aid, in **3 basic steps**.

Remember that these are only *suggested* approaches. There is no “one way” to create a memory aid, and everyone’s method will look different. Take what you need from this toolkit and focus on the areas that you feel would be most helpful to you. To get started, consider reviewing the tips and strategies that follow.

The 3 C’s (or Steps) to Creating a Memory Aid



Step 1: Choose Your Content

Review course materials and identify key information you need to know for the test. Decide on what concepts you need help remembering most and plan to refer to in your memory aid.



Step 2: Create Mnemonic Devices

Create cues to help you remember the information you created in Step 1. These cues are also known as **mnemonic devices**—personal “hints” that represent the information you are trying to remember.



Step 3: Compile Your Information

Bring together your content and organize it into one final document. This also involves a final review to ensure that your document follows the [Memory Aid Guidelines](#).

Here are some things to keep in mind as you begin to work on your memory aid:

Memory aids are personal.



You are designing your memory aid to make sense for only one person—you. The content (cues) you create represents how you personally associate with the information you need to recall during your test. Think of your content as your own personal language or “code,”—something that is to be understood by you.

They can present a learning curve.



Finding your ‘style’ as you develop your memory aid, as you familiarize yourself with the guidelines can sometimes take a bit of trial and error. Be patient with the process and take your time to experiment with the approaches that work well with your learning preferences.

They are a product of studying.



Creating a memory aid is part of a bigger studying process. For a memory aid to be useful, it is important to engage with your course materials early in the semester to learn the content well. In other words, you first need to know and understand the information, before you can create a cue that would help you recall it.

Step 1: Choose Your Content



As a first step, decide on what specific course information you will refer to in your memory aid. This is where you ask yourself, *what key information do I need help remembering most?*

You can start answering this question by:

a) Studying.

Review your course materials. **Think about:** what information you need to know for the test, how well you know it, and what concepts you might need to focus on/study further.

Try It:

- Make a list of course concepts that you need to know for the test.
- Add a second column next to your list.
- Next to each item, make note of what you *specifically* need help remembering about that concept. You can narrow them down like this:

b) Making a List.

Decide on what key pieces information you will likely need help remembering most during the test.

What I Need to Know (for the test)	What I Need Help Remembering
<i>Utilitarianism</i>	<i>What "utilitarianism" means (i.e.; the definition)</i>
<i>Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (5 stages)</i>	<i>The order of each stage, plus examples</i>
<i>Flora vs. Fauna</i>	<i>The difference between them</i>
<i>Alkaline Earth Metals (6 in total)</i>	<i>Their names and their individual properties</i>
<i>Harlem Renaissance</i>	<i>Historical significance (why it was important)</i>

Step 2: Create Mnemonic Devices



Now it's time to turn the items on your list into **mnemonic devices**. Mnemonic devices are tools you create to help you recall information. They will make up the content of your memory aid.

How do mnemonic devices work?

Think of mnemonic devices as the keys to a “mental filing cabinet.” The information you learned is already stored in your memory, but you may just need a hint, or a nudge, to help “unlock” it.

What do mnemonic devices look like?

Mnemonic devices can be recorded as image, text or as audio. They *represent the main idea* of the information you want to recall. They can range from basic to abstract, and you can attach your own, personal meaning to them.

To create a mnemonic device, start simple. For each course concept, just ask yourself:

“What would remind me of...?”

Example: “What would remind me of the meaning of “empowerment”?”

Possible mnemonic: an image of a “fist pump”



Try It:

- 1) Go through the list of course information you created in Step 1. For each item, try brainstorming a mnemonic device that represents that specific concept. Jot them down.

Other prompts you can use during this brainstorming process are:

What do I personally associate with...?

What makes me think of...?

What ideas can I relate to...?

- 2) Revisit your mnemonic devices in the next day or so. Think about whether you can still make sense of them or remember what they are referring to. A *meaningful* mnemonic device—one that is based on your own prior knowledge and personal associations—can be easily recognized and trigger your overall understanding of the course concept.

How to Brainstorm Mnemonic Devices: A ‘Think Aloud’ Process

Here are some examples of how to break down course concepts and turn them into mnemonic devices. These refer to the sample list you read in Step 1 and will guide you through a basic “think aloud” process that could be useful to adapt as you begin to brainstorm.

1. A Definition (Subject: Philosophy)

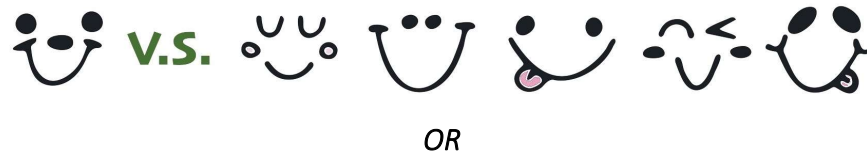
Concept to Remember: Utilitarianism: a philosophy that means the “greatest happiness, for the greatest number.”

Ask yourself:

What would help me remember the meaning behind Utilitarianism?

Possible Hints: multiple happy faces, examples of helping others, selflessness

Final Mnemonic(s):



“Jahanne donated his birthday money to the homeless shelter.”

2. Multiple Stages of a Theory (Subject: Sociology)

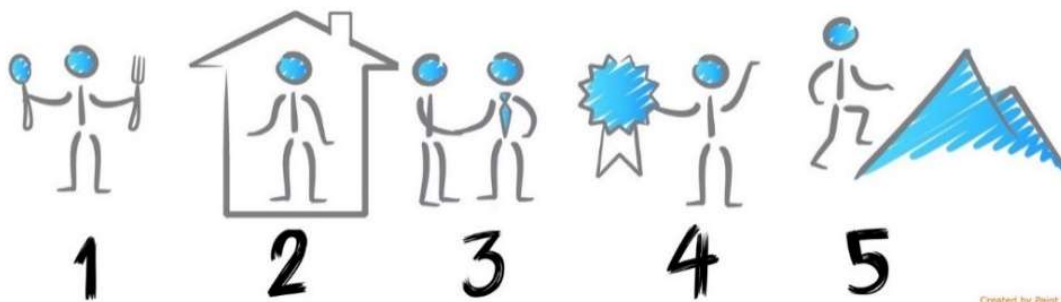
Concept to Remember: 1. Physiological, 2. Safety, 3. Belongingness, 4. Esteem and 5. Self-actualization Needs

Ask yourself:

What ideas can I associate with each stage of Maslow’s hierarchy?

Possible Hints: images related to food, shelter, socializing, success and adventure

Final Mnemonic(s):



3. The Difference Between 2 Concepts (Subject: Science)

Concept to Remember: Flora (=animal life) and Fauna (=plant life)

Ask yourself:

How can I tell the difference between Fauna and Flora?

Possible Hints: Examples of animals and plants → dogs and roses

Donna rhymes with Fauna; Dora rhymes with Flora

Final Mnemonic:

“Donna’s dog ate Dora’s roses.”

4. A List of Items Belonging to a Category (Subject: Science)

Concept to Remember: Alkaline Earth Metals (Beryllium, Magnesium, Calcium, Strontium, Barium and Radium). Common characteristics: shiny, silver and reactive under high temperatures.

Ask yourself: *What can help me remember all 6 metals?*

Possible Hints: the first letter of each word; a phrase that reminds me of what they have in common

Final Mnemonic(s):

B.M.C.S.B.R

OR

“Bright Metals Cause Some Big Responses”

5. A Historical Movement (Subject: Modern American History)

Concept to Remember: The Harlem Renaissance: an African-American movement of the 1920s that celebrated artistic expression and cultural heritage in Harlem, New York.

Ask yourself: *What can I relate to the main ideas behind the Harlem Renaissance?*

Possible Hints: theme of identity; self-expression; artist names (e.g. the poet Langston Hughes)

Final Mnemonic:



Step 3: Compile Your Information



Now that you've created the content of your memory aid, it's time to compile it all into one, final document. In this last step, you will prepare your memory aid for submission to your instructor.

Your final check-over includes making sure that your memory aid is **A)** accessible to you, and **B)** that it also follows the content and formatting requirements outlined in the [Memory Aid Guidelines](#).

A Checklist for Finalizing Your Memory Aid

- I can easily understand the content of my memory aid

Tip: After you first create your mnemonic devices, revisit your memory aid content once more (if time permits). Ask yourself if the mnemonic devices you created are likely to help you trigger recall of that specific concept on the day of the test. If not, consider revising the mnemonic device to something that is more intuitive for you. See FAQ no. 2 (on pg. 9) for more suggestions.

- My memory aid is “readable” to me

Is your document easy to read? It's helpful to make sure that you can easily navigate through your memory aid. The more organized it is, the easier you could locate the information you need during your test.

Tip: Consider organizing your information into sections and space apart your mnemonic devices. You can do this by:

- *using borders to differentiate between mnemonic devices*
- *numbering/lettering off your mnemonic devices*
- *grouping related mnemonic devices together (ex. from the same unit or chapter)*
- *using diagrams to show their relationship to one another (e.g. arrows, Venn diagrams, tables, etc.)*

- My memory aid accurately follows the Memory Aid Guidelines, including:

- o formatting guidelines (1 page, double spaced, double sided and 12-point font on an 8 ½ x 11” sheet of paper)
- o content guidelines (provides cues, but not a complete answer)

Double
(x2)
Spaced

HELLO
my name is
LANGSTON

1 Page

11"

Double
(x2)
Sided

8.5"

Important: Please refer to the document [Memory Aid Guidelines](#) for complete details on each of the above requirements.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. What if I cannot fit everything into the memory aid? What if I have too much information?

Using a memory aid often means deciding what information you need to have with you *most* during a test. If you find that you have too many course concepts to fit into your document, try ranking them from most difficult to recall to least difficult (or most important to least). Focus on creating mnemonic devices for the former.

Tip: A good time to do this ranking exercise is after you create your initial list in Step 1. Another alternative is to simplify your mnemonic devices to allow for more space on your memory aid.

2. What do I do if I cannot remember what my mnemonic devices mean?

Here are some ways you can become more familiar with your memory aid content:

- **Embed mnemonics into your notes.** As you study for your test, try cross referencing the material you are studying with the mnemonic devices you created to represent them.
- **Start creating early.** Make it a habit to review your course notes on a weekly basis. You could also try creating “draft mnemonic devices” for some key ideas for each class, which you can add to your memory aid in the future.
- **Be consistent.** Maintain consistency by re-using mnemonic devices for concepts that repeat themselves throughout the term/your program. Create a legend to refer to later.

3. What if my professor doesn't approve of my memory aid? Do I have to start over?

Ask your instructor to provide you with feedback about which specific parts of your memory aid compromise academic integrity. Make changes to those specific areas and incorporate their suggestions.

Tip: One way to avoid re-doing an entire memory aid is to create 5-10 “draft mnemonic devices” to show your instructor beforehand. Tell them that those samples reflect how you plan to complete the rest of your memory aid. If there is a concern, invite additional feedback so that you are better aware of how to proceed with your final document.

4. How do I make sure that I am not providing a “complete answer”?

Memory aid content *refers* to key course concepts but does not elaborate on them.

The content of your memory aid is supposed to give you just enough information so that it helps you recall the concept you learned, which you will then elaborate on during your test.

Tip: To avoid including complete answers on your memory aid, try this rule of thumb: if you gave your memory aid to another person, they should not be able to decode, or fully understand the content of it. As we said before, it's a personal document, and intended to make sense only to you.